Oil and Greens in Washington

CounterPunch

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The Collapse of the Mainstream Greens

The environmental movement is in upheaval and as a consequence many of the familiar landmarks and signposts across the political landscape are beginning to disappear or to point in new directions. Some of the effects could become visible as soon as the upcoming elections in November.

The tradition of genteel conservationism in the Republican Party pretty much disappeared during the slash-and-burn years of Reagan and Bush. These days, environmentalists are mostly Democrats and indeed a very important part of the Democrats' base of support. It would not take too many defections to fracture that coalition, and as we shall see, such defections are already taking place.

The proximate cause of the overall crisis in the environmental movement is not hard to find. The big green organizations invested heavily in a Clinton-Gore victory and some of their top officials — George Frampton of the Wilderness Society, Brooks Yeager of National Audubon — took jobs in the new government. The secretary of the interior himself, Bruce Babbitt, was formerly head of the "bipartisan" League of Conservation Voters.

The investment has been worthless. Having abandoned any independent, critical posture the national green leadership found itself meekly defending one sell-out after another by Clinton, on forests, water, pesticides, and almost every other area of concern.

Meanwhile, environmental lobbyists largely dropped hill work in exchange for easy access to the lower levels of the Clinton administration, creating a vacuum which allowed the timber Democrats — led by Tom Foley — to reassert themselves.

The environmental establishment saw hope of strengthening the Endangered Species Act vanish. They saw threats even to such totems as the Delaney Amendment banning cancer-causing additives to processed foods. And they panicked.

In July of this year the leaders of 15 major environmental groups sent out a joint Mayday call to all their members, several million in number, in such groups as Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, National Audubon, the Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society. The "call to action" quavered out the grim news: "Even during the Reagan/Watt/Gorsuch years, we have never faced such a serious threat to our environmental laws in Congress. Polluters have blocked virtually all of our efforts ...Now they are mounting an all-out effort to weaken our most important environmental laws."

By early September the SOS had elicited a sarcastic rebuke from 173 grassroots battlers for environmental causes across the country, contacted by people including Peter Montague of *Rachel's Environmental and Health Weekly*. "We would very much like to meet with you," the answer began. "We want to talk about something your letter did not mention: the source of these problems...[are] the leaders of today's giant corporations and the powerful corporations they direct."

The bitter response nipped at the Achilles' heel of mainstream environmentalism. Much of the flabby coalition depends on corporate handouts. The others, who survive on (declining) membership dues, like the Sierra Club, feel the corporate goad indirectly, through big foundations such as Rockefeller, Pew Charitable Trusts, and W. Alton Jones.

In late September the Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise, aka the Wise Use movement, sworn foe of the environmentalists (see **CounterPunch**, Vol. 1, No. 6), issued a booklet called "Getting

(Continued on page 4)

IN THIS ISSUE

The Browning of Beltway Environmentalism

- How Foundation Dollars and the Democrats Hamstrung the Environmental Movement
- Following the money back to Big Oil

Would You Buy a $545 Subscription from This Man?

- Prophesies from William Colby, the man who missed Tet

Plus:

- The worst of Haiti Coverage

Back from the Future

"President-elect Nixon's appointment of Henry Kissinger...is a reassuring sign. He is an intelligent, articulate and remarkably industrious scholar. His record scarcely supports his journalistic reputation as a foreign policy hard-liner."

— James Reston,
The New York Times,
Dec. 4, 1968

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Phoenix Resurgent

The Autumn of a Mass Murderer

As with fellow Vietnam-era war criminals Robert McNamara and Henry Kissinger, time has been kind to William Colby. The man who in the late Sixties directed the Phoenix Program – a secret "pacification" campaign for Vietnam in which more than 20,000 communist "suspects" were rounded up and executed – has graduated to the role of respected advisor to multinational corporations. Named director of the CIA in September of 1973, just in time to oversee the Agency-backed coup that brought Pinochet to power in Chile, Colby now gets big fees promoting "interactive spy adventures" for a computer games company.

Since resigning from the Agency in 1976, Colby has carefully fostered an image as a dove. He supported the nuclear freeze in the early Eighties and during the Bush administration called for reduction of the military budget by 50 percent. In an admiring profile several years ago, *The New York Times*' Elaine Sciolino wondered whether Colby "is a born-again liberal atoning for past misdeeds...[or] a lifelong populist who is driven to tears by the plight of the world when he watches the nightly news."

The Phoenix director's latest venture is *The Colby Report For International Business: Critical Intelligence for International Business Leaders to Chart A Safe, Profitable Course in a Complex, Dynamic World Economy*. For a mere $545 per annum, subscribers receive 26 four-page reports, a "distinctive binder" to store issues and Colby's fax number for urgent queries.

Colby's meager analytic tools have not improved from the days of his Tet humiliation

In a promo letter sent to potential subscribers, Colby said he had spent his career "predicting the impact of world events [and] at the risk of sounding immodest, my predictions are usually right on target." This self-portrayal as a visionary is hardly supported by his past.

As head of the Agency's Far East Division, Colby failed to foresee the 1968 Tet Offensive. Under the noses of Colby and the station's 600 officers, Vietcong forces infiltrated tons of weaponry into South Vietnam and briefly occupied virtually every important city and town across the country. It was, in the words of retired agent Ralph McGehee, "one of history's most disastrous intelligence failures."

Colby also egregiously misread the results of the April 9, 1961 South Vietnamese election – rigged with CIA assistance – in which Ngo Dinh Diem was elected with some 70 percent of the votes. In a cheery secret dispatch from Saigon on May 22, Colby informed top-level Kennedy administration officials that the "psychological uplift [the election] supplied to the regime and to public morale in general was considerable...The President won a solid majority everywhere on his own merits." Already spying light at the end of the tunnel, Colby proclaimed that Diem's triumph had "enhanced stability and encouraged hope for the national future."

According to former Agency officer Paul Sakwa, Colby's rosy assessment – which Sakwa calls "totally divorced from reality" – helped convince administration planners that Diem was worth backing because he had won a legitimate election. "His reports had a great deal to do with our expanded involvement in the war," says Sakwa. "The end result was 50,000 American dead, 1 million Vietnamese dead and huge numbers wounded on both sides."

These minor failures behind him, Colby promises subscribers "inside – and I mean inside – business intelligence." **CounterPunch** agents having secured the materials, we can report that, based on a review of three issues of the *Colby Report*, the former CIA director's meager analytic tools have not improved from the days of his Tet humiliation.

Bold, shocking predictions abound. Colby's readers learn that "Congress will agree to the GATT free trade agreement" and that "North Korea will not attack South Korea."

Much of the newsletter is devoted to thumbnail country profiles which provide the same keen insight as that found more cheaply in *USA Today*:

- "After getting off to one of the best starts in post-colonial Africa, Kenya has stalled in mid-course...Stay away until Kenya's politicians and society rebuild a secure base for participation in the world community."
- "Nigeria typifies Africa's greatest problems...Crime, corruption, con men and coups rule the day...Stay away."
- "The [Venezuelan] army has talked coup and takeovers but has not yet acted. A coup would be received badly in Washington...and could lead to economic sanctions. Stay out."

Colby heavily recommends investment in the country he helped ravage two decades ago. "Seventy million literate, intelligent, hard working Vietnamese are intensely focused on using their entrepreneurial skills to join the world economy," writes Colby. "So, go for it." This rave review is no doubt influenced by the fact – not mentioned in the newsletter – that Colby recently became the highly-paid director of a fund to raise $100 million for new investments in Vietnam.

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CounterPunch's No. 1 tip for the prudent investor is to save $545 by not subscribing to Colby's newsletter. As the Phoenix mastermind himself might put it, "New publication typifies America's problems. Crime and con men rule the day. Stay away."

Historical note: Despite Colby's glowing reports, many in the CIA knew that Diem's 1961 election was a sham. In a field report two days after the vote, one officer recognized that there had been "mass manipulation of the returns... Diem found the overwhelming vote in his favor from the provinces embarrassingly high and [considered] the desirability of scaling down those returns which gave him over 95 percent."

On March 31, ten days before the balloting, a field agent detailed the Saigon government's plan. Excerpts from the report, provided to **CounterPunch** by an ex-Vietnam desk officer, revealed:

The covert campaign will consist of:

- Organizing propaganda teams to lower the prestige of dangerous opposition candidates.
- Illegalizing all forms of campaigning for enemy candidates.
- Selecting key cadre to take charge of ballot boxes and to tally votes.

The following covert activity will be used *only* if necessary:

- Placing key cadre among the people to guide them to cast ballots to our advantage.
- Switching ballot boxes when they are being moved.
- Using the army and civil servants to cast ballots in many different areas.

Enemy sabotage before the election may include the following legal measures:

- Demanding the rights of freedom and democracy, based on constitutional promises.
- Submitting petitions stating demands.
- Demanding the right to criticize the President.

The U.S. press treated this farce with the utmost reverence. "Diem's Victory in Vietnam Vote Seen as a Repudiation for Reds," ran the headline in the April 11, 1961 *New York Times*. The accompanying story by correspondent Robert Trumbull said the president's election signified a "crushing" setback for Communism "as well as a public tribute to the strong-willed leader, however much some of his policies may be criticized." ■

■ IN BRIEF ■

House of Babble

The press is always at its most obsequious during times of foreign affairs uproar, particularly when U.S. troops are dispatched abroad. The day after American Marines were sent to Haiti *The Washington Post* reported that our boys had "briskly seized" the Port-au-Prince airport. During times of crisis merely "seizing" airports isn't good enough; hence, insertion of the crucial adverb.

In the case of Haiti, journalists have served up the myth of "good intentions" in ample portions. There was David Broder declaring that Clinton "has followed the idealistic President Woodrow Wilson in sending American

Laptop warrior taunts Taps, twists tail of neurotic lion

forces to Haiti." (One of the idealistic U.S. Marine commanders during that earlier invasion, Col. L.W.T. Waller, said in rejecting negotiations with rebel forces that he would never go "bowing and scraping to these coons.") The *Post*'s William Booth – disdaining the well-known links between the U.S. and Haitian armed forces and this country's pernicious historical role in Latin America – wrote, "If ever there was an unlikely collaboration, it is the attempt here to marry the forces of Haiti's repressive military and the U.S. Marines through the diplomatic equivalent of a shotgun wedding."

Maureen Dowd of *The New York Times*, the Rona Barrett of the Clinton era, was responsible for September 22nd's "The Mouse That Roared Squeaks Back." The "mouse," of course, was Aristide ("the slight, left-wing Roman Catholic cleric with the Creole accent and exotic metaphors"), whom Dowd derided as being ungrateful to Clinton despite the latter's having spent "three years [trying] to restore him to power even as he often openly griped about American policy."

"You could almost hear the gritting of teeth in Washington this week, as the great bowed to the small and the small reluctantly nodded back," began the article – published the day after Haitian forces cracked the heads of dozens of Aristide's supporters for the benefit of U.S. film crews. "[After] elaborate courting, coddling, wheedling and nudging, it sometimes seemed this week that all the might of the United States was holding its breath, waiting to see if Father Aristide would step up to the microphones today and say the two little words the Administration longed to hear: Thank you."

Despite these worthy contenders, the prize for silliest Beltway babble goes to *Newsweek*'s Michael Elliott. Perhaps seeking to emulate Jeanne "Totalitarianism vs. Authoritarianism" Kirkpatrick's move from state intellectual to government service, he penned "The Neurotic Lion," a ludicrous piece whose premise was that world order depended mightily on U.S. intervention abroad, but that such action was becoming increasingly difficult because weak-kneed Americans "simply cannot stand the thin drizzle of casualties from countries far away."

"If it isn't Haiti, it's Somalia; if it isn't Somalia, it's Rwanda," wrote Elliott, firmly shouldering the white man's burden. "As far as the eye can see, this is what military engagement now means – the intervention by a multinational force of the rich world's soldiers...in the affairs of a Godforsaken 'failed nation.'" Yet with Americans increasingly "skittish about taking part in wars in which people die," complained Elliott, the rich world's army might be deprived of its vitally needed U.S. brigade.

Elliott's solution: Stop treating soldiers "as if they were yeomen on a short leave from the plow" and start treating them as "professionals who may kill or be killed." For good measure, Americans must get over their "attachment to symbols of a peculiarly lugubrious kind: Arlington Cemetery, 'Taps,' the slow folding of a flag over a coffin."

In short, uncage the mighty lion. ■

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(Continued from page 1)

Rich: The Environmental Movement's income, salary, contributors and investment patterns." The idiom of rugged rural populism chosen by the Wise Users (themselves swollen with corporate slush) is amply justified by the materials they review.

First there was the matter of the substantial salaries enjoyed by some of the directors of the big green groups; $242,060 to Jay Hair of National Wildlife, $185,000 to Kathryn Fuller of World Wildlife, $178,000 to Peter Berle of National Audubon, $193,000 to Fred Krupp of Environmental Defense Fund. (Carl Pope of the Sierra Club draws, by austere contrast, $77,142, and Barbara Dudley of Greenpeace Fund, $65,000.)

Then there were the major corporate contributors: Alcoa, Ford, GE, Monsanto, Procter & Gamble to National Audubon; ARCO, GE, Mobil, Shell, Weyerhaeuser to World Wildlife; Times-Mirror to EDF. Investment portfolios, too, are sometimes far from tactful. The Wilderness Society, for example, holds shares in Caterpillar, Deere & Co., and Walt Disney.

But "Getting Rich" is most solidly on the money with its extracts from the minutes of a discussion at the Environmental Grantmakers Association's 1992 annual retreat.The Grantmakers is an operation run by the Rockefeller Family Fund, mustering in purposeful conclave the 160 or so private foundations that provide most of the $340 million issued each year as environmental grants. It cannot be stressed too greatly that the environmental movement is fueled almost entirely by foundation money, and the biggest funders are oil-based, most notably Rockefeller and Pew (Sun Oil). Big oil plays both sides. Wise Use gets money from Chevron, Amoco, B.P., and Exxon.

The 1992 meeting of the Grantmakers witnessed Don Ross of Rockefeller Family Fund saying that "the funders have a major role to play" and should now dictate the strategy and tactics of major environmental campaigns: "I know there are resentments in the community towards funders doing that. And, too bad. We're players, they're players."

A new conservation movement is being born. It is radical, and it is community-based

To the Wise Users, this is powerful fuel for their fanning of populist suspicions that big Eastern money, notably the Rockefellers, runs the environmental movement. To a considerable degree this is now true, as the saga of the forest fights in the Pacific Northwest illustrates.

Through the late Eighties the battle against the timber companies was waged by regional groups like the Oregon Natural Resources Council and by local organizers such as Oregon's Michael Donnelly. With the help of Judge William Dwyer and his famous decision on the spotted owl, the timber companies were fought to a standstill.

The fight, hitherto scanted by the national environmental groups and the big funders, became a fashionable one. By this time Ross and Pete Meyers at the W. Alton Jones Foundation were beginning to sponsor the concept of ecosystem management, in which tasks of conservation would be removed from a regulatory context (don't log here, keep wilderness there) and entrusted to scientists. The upshot of this technocratic mania was Clinton's Option 9 plan, which permitted chainsaw access to sacrosanct preserves of ancient trees on the Northwest coast.

The necessary political cowing of local grassroots resistance was managed along the lines sketched by Ross in 1992. The small funders who had traditionally staked hard-core activism were brought into the sphere of interest of the big national foundations, in a process of Rockefeller-trustification familiar to any student of American business.

But Ross carried yet another affiliation, to the Democratic Party, and his instrument in bringing refractory groups to heel was an associate from his Naderite PIRG days, Bob Chlopak. Laden with Rockefeller, W. Alton Jones and Pew cash, Chlopak essentially bought up the grassroots movement of the Northwest and headquartered the vanquished remnants in Washington, servile to the motions of the Democrats.

The political consequences of these stratagems and maneuvers are now coming due. Among grassroots organizers across the country there is profound disaffection from mainstream environmentalism, and from the Democratic Party. In Montana the independent candidacy of Steve Kelly – one of the founders of the Alliance for the Wild Rockies – threatens the Democratic incumbent, Pat Williams. In New Mexico, *El Partido Verde*, running for a number of statewide posts, has put together a coalition of greens, indigenous and Hispanic groups.

It doesn't take many defections to put people like Williams in Montana – or even Tom Foley – at risk. This is not a matter of anti-environmentalist backlash. Such "backlashes" come in states such as Utah and Arizona, which Clinton lost anyway. These are pro-environmental grassroots backlashes, speaking to the 54 percent – in a recent poll – who believe that alternatives to both Democrats and Republicans are necessary.

It would be premature to say that the new grassroots activism will cause major upsets as early as November, but a new conservation movement is being born. It is radical, and it is community-based. It is a movement born out of the decline and fall of mainstream environmentalism, with the Clinton administration as involuntary midwife. ■

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